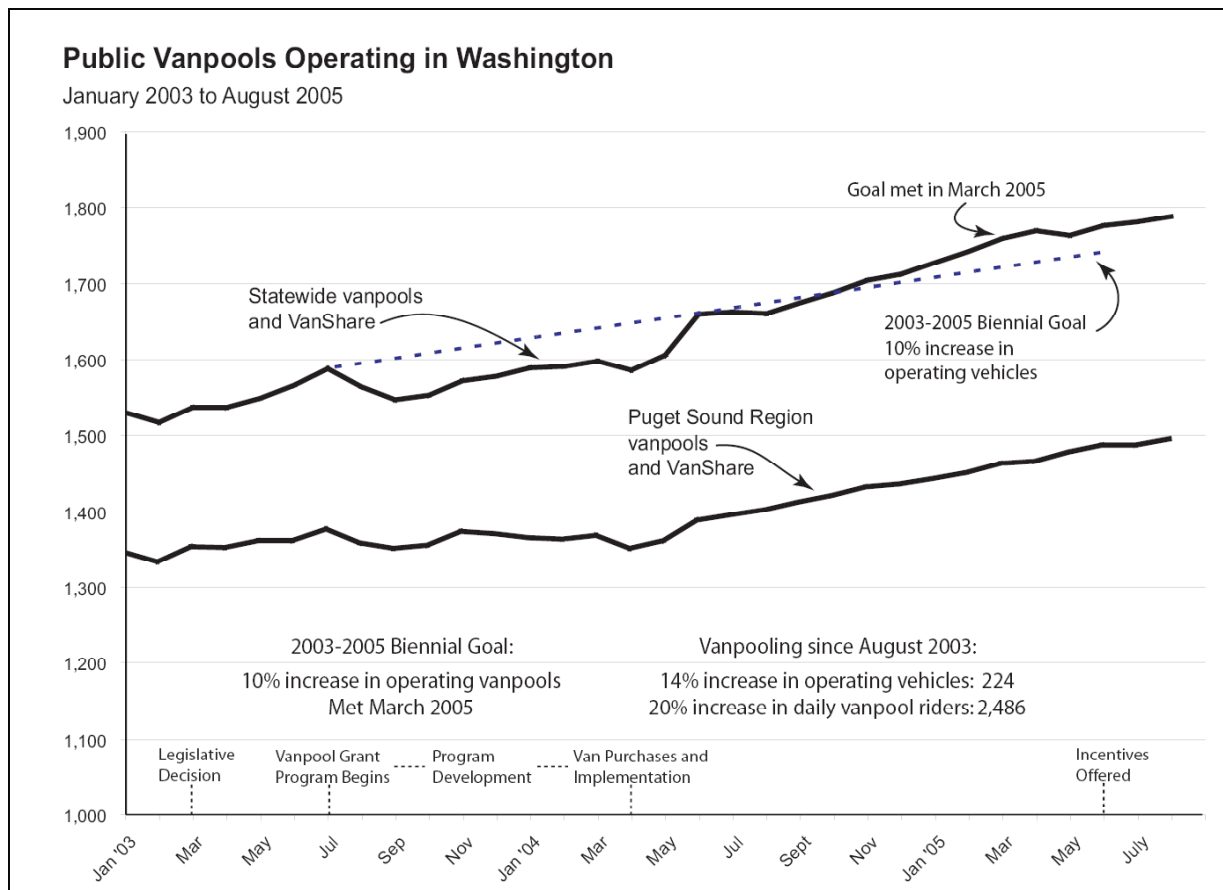


## Status Report on Vanpool Grant Program

In August 2005 statewide vanpool ridership stood at nearly 15,000 daily riders. This is a 20 percent increase over the level of two years ago. Also at the end of August 2005, there were 1,789 vans in operation, an increase of 14 percent over two years ago. Vanpool operators have told WSDOT they expect ridership returns for September and October to be higher still, setting new records.

In 2003, the Washington State Legislature created a vanpool grant program to increase the use of vanpooling by the state's commuters. The program was funded at \$4 million for the 2003–2005 biennium and at \$5 million for the 2005–2007 biennium. The funds are for public transit agencies and can be used only for the capital costs of putting new vans on the road and for incentives for employers to increase employee vanpool use.

WSDOT and transit agencies created the Vanpool Investment Program to guide vanpool program development and manage vanpool grants. The program exceeded its goal of increasing vanpooling by ten percent over the 2003–2005 biennium. In the first months of the new biennium, vanpooling has continued to grow.



## Status Report on Vanpool Grant Program

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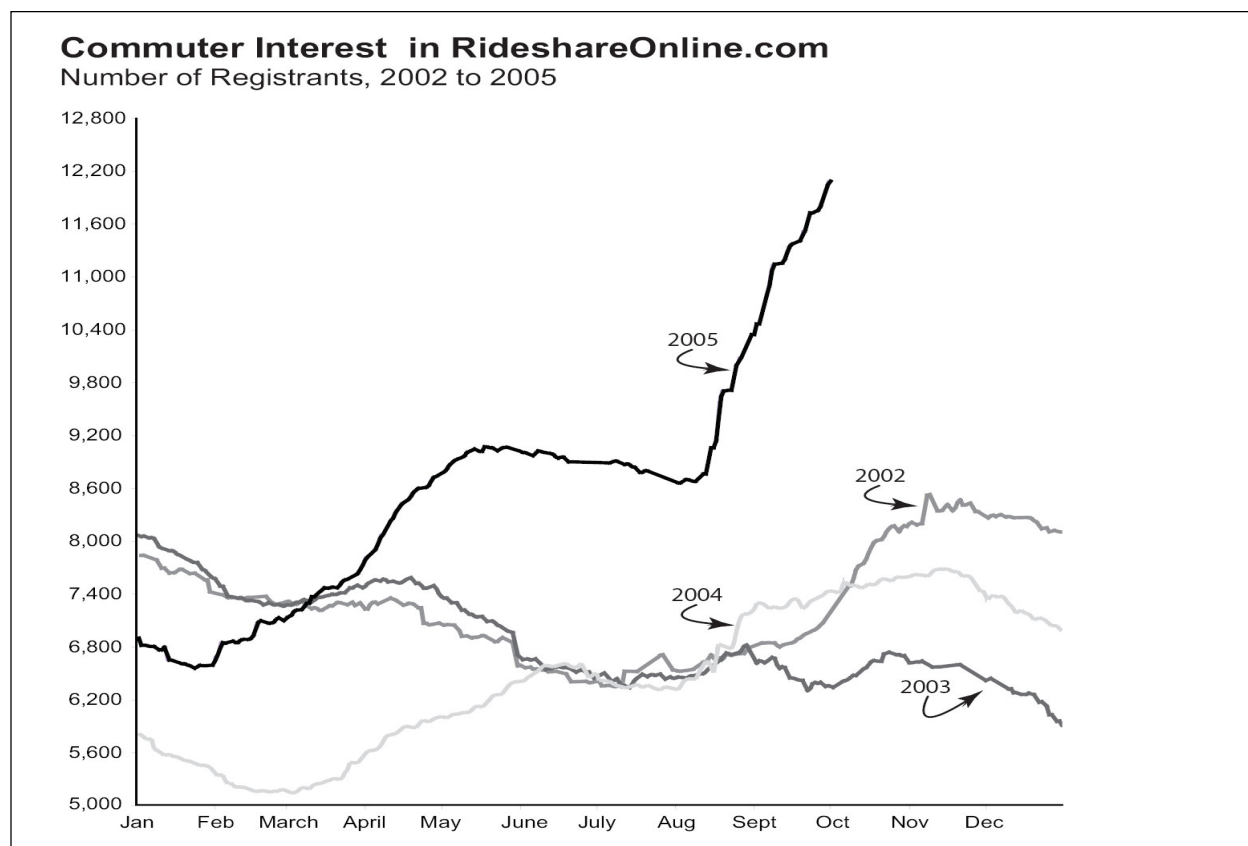
In 2003–2005, ten transit agencies purchased 170 vans with WSDOT-administered grant funds and five new vanpool programs were formed. Even without purchasing any vehicles, King County Metro Transit experienced a 4 percent annual increase in vanpool passenger trips, a turnaround following a four-year decline coinciding with an economic downturn. The Puget Sound region overall experienced an 8 percent growth.

These numbers represent historic highs in terms of vanpool occupancy, number of vans in operation, number of vanshares in operation, and number of passenger miles.

### Interest in ridesharing parallels the increase in vanpool ridership

[RideshareOnline.com](http://RideshareOnline.com) is a free, statewide service that introduces commuters to others who might want to vanpool or carpool to work together. RideshareOnline.com also assists operators in developing new vanpools or finding riders for existing vanpools.<sup>1</sup>

WSDOT invested in expanding RideshareOnline statewide early in 2005, contributing to nearly doubling the number of visitors in the first nine months of the year compared with the same period in 2004. As of September 2005, nearly 13,000 individuals had sought ridematch information from the online service. A survey is being developed to track successful matches and the persistence of the groups formed.



<sup>1</sup> Data on ridesharing registration comes from King County Metro Rideshare Services. RideshareOnline is also used to locate carpools for travel to special events in King County.

### Using targeted financial incentives to encourage growth

While gains in vanpooling can be attributed to the recent high price of fuel and to better ride matching information, growth can also be attributed to the use of targeted financial incentives and employer outreach to increase the van occupancy rates. The average occupancy rate of vans is up four percent.

Financial incentives were paid out during 2005 part of a public awareness campaign entitled “[Freewheeling: Vanpooling is your trip, your way.](#)”<sup>2</sup> The campaign included outdoor billboards, radio spots, transit advertising, and printed materials. Mastercard gift cards were given to new vanpool riders, to new drivers, and to those who recruited a new rider into an existing van.

During the 2004 session, the Legislature recognized incentives as a way to grow and maintain market share by modifying the original 2003 legislation to allow funds to be used for incentives. Since all of the available state funds for the 2003–2005 biennium were used to purchase vans, WSDOT and the vanpool operators developed the incentive program with other funding available through a federal Job Access and Reverse Commute grant.

### Short-term versus long-term gains

As the price of gas has increased vanpooling has proven to be an option for many commuters in the state. Research has shown that when people try a commute option and have a satisfactory experience, many of them will continue to use it to get to work. In addition, vanpoolers tend to be older than the average transit commuter, to have stable jobs and live further from their jobs. Once formed, many vanpools last for years. Transit staff are available to help people form vanpools and to keep seats filled so that vans continue to be a cost-effective.

### Demand for vans could exceed supply

Most operators are reporting that current demand for vans exceeds supply and that they are filling existing vans to capacity. WSDOT staff and the operators are working closely together to utilize all available resources. Operators are holding on to vans that had been scheduled for surplus to meet their needs. Where surplus vans are available, WSDOT acts as a broker to lease them to other agencies so that new customers aren’t kept waiting. Agencies are moving vans quickly and are requesting more statewide than last biennium.

Increased requests for vans could soon exhaust all the \$5M funds authorized for the 2005–2007 biennium. For FY 2006, seventeen operators have estimated a need for at least 200 vans, more than the 170 ordered for the entire 2003–2005 biennium. In addition, operators have begun submitting needs for FY 2007, a capital demand that WSDOT anticipates being unable to meet.

### Questions?

Contact Kathy Johnston, Vanpool Program Manager, (360) 705-7925 or [johnstk@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:johnstk@wsdot.wa.gov)

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<sup>2</sup> More information about the “Freewheeling” campaign is available at <https://www.jnrcard.com/rideshareonline/freewheeling.php>